

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## 2007-2008 School Improvement Fund State Application

Public Law 107-110, Section 1003(g)



The state of Florida has approximately 3,500 schools, of which 1,383 receive Title I funding. Of these, 1,001 are currently identified as in need of improvement, in corrective action, planning for or implementing restructuring. Specifically, 435 are currently “planning for restructuring” [School in Need of Improvement Year 4, or (SINI 4)], and 27 are currently implementing their restructuring plans (SINI 5). These 462 schools need substantial support.

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) has chosen to view these challenges as opportunities, and has spent the last six months working with Brown University and the Florida and the Islands Comprehensive Center (FLICC) to refine FDOE’s role in the school improvement process. This work will continue as the FDOE shifts its focus to building *Local Educational Agency (LEA) level* capacity to improve and support schools.

## **PART A – FUNDS RETAINED BY THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY (SEA)**

Florida has recognized the centrality of the relationship between an LEA and its schools in the grant making process. For 2006-2007, Public Law (P.L.) 107-110, Section 1003(a), grants, Florida created a funding formula based on student performance that results in school level allocations, but has provided each LEA with the discretion to target either those schools that are lowest performing or other Title I schools for improvement funds. This framework acknowledges that not only are federal resources a relatively small percentage of an LEA’s funding, but LEAs often have already prioritized the lowest performing schools for special initiatives or targeted resources.

For 2007-2008, Florida cannot reserve any P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(a) funds, since its award was so dramatically reduced, and the hold harmless provisions make it impossible to reserve any funds for school improvement. As a result, Florida is faced with two challenges: a state system that cannot fully support, at scale, the number of schools in improvement, and a lack of financial resources to build a larger system. In this, Florida mirrors the nation.

In regard to P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds, FDOE will retain 5 percent, or \$286,493, of its total allocation of \$5.7 million, for state level activities. These funds will be consolidated, consistent with provisions of P.L. 107-110, Section 9201 and Florida’s approved consolidated application. Florida is fully cognizant of its responsibilities with respect to meeting the requirements of P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g), and the applicable requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, Sections 1116 and 1117, and consolidated administration funding is appropriately allocated for state level functions needed to fulfill these responsibilities.

FDOE has, for many years, invested in a sophisticated data system because it understands the value of using data to drive decision-making. In addition, LEAs understand the significance of using multiple data sources to drive decision making, using the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) developmental scale scores, FCAT mini assessments, Average Yearly Progress (AYP) reports, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early



Literacy Skills™ (DIBELS™), and Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) results, in conjunction to define the needs of schools and LEAs as a whole.

In Florida, the very lowest achieving schools receive targeted support through its statewide system of support, Assistance Plus, funded with both state and federal resources. Assistance Plus provides dedicated facilitators who work as coaches at the school level, serving as partners in the school improvement process. These resources, however, are extremely limited. Currently, 42 of the 462 schools are served under Assistance Plus, but Florida has been working to build its capacity to provide site specific, dedicated resources to all low performing schools. To date, FDOE has dedicated resources to supporting schools that are planning for or implementing restructuring, and is working with Brown University and the FLICC to analyze FDOE's role in the school improvement process.

Funds from this grant would augment FDOE's current system of support, increasing the capacity of both the Department and its LEAs to support schools in conducting comprehensive data analysis, aligning curriculum and instruction, and implementing specific interventions for struggling subgroups.

FDOE proposes to focus its statewide system of support by aligning LEA investment to data driven reform. P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds will be allocated to assist LEAs in building their capacity to improve schools based on comprehensive, ongoing data analysis and specific interventions aligned with student performance data. This support aligns with the following two improvement strategies listed in the Request for Proposal:

- Utilize research based strategies or practices to change instructional practice to address the academic achievement problems that caused the school to be identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.
- Implement other strategies determined by the SEA or LEA, as appropriate, for which data indicates is likely to result in improved teaching and learning in schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

The decision to focus financial support to LEAs on these two strategies evolved through an examination of student and LEA performance and conversations with LEAs on how P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds should be used to impact student achievement. Particularly, FDOE has determined through data analysis that, statewide, our African American students and Students with Disabilities are the lowest performing subgroups in schools that are planning for or implementing restructuring. Therefore, LEA and school level implementation will focus on activities based on research to improve the achievement of these and other low performing subgroups in the LEA.

It is the staff of the LEA that supports and relates to schools every day. They understand the community and the school's context and history, and are in a better position to leverage resources for school improvement and monitor implementation. Resources provided through this grant would be concentrated on building LEA and school capacity to support ongoing data analysis, extending teacher time to analyze data and align

curriculum, and implementing one particular intervention that has shown to be successful with subgroups not meeting AYP benchmarks. These activities would be designed to address specific school based performance issues. In their applications for funding, LEAs would be required to identify, and support with available state and local data, the specific strategies that will be applied in each school.

## **PART B – FUNDS AWARDED TO LEAS**

As mentioned above, P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds for 2007-2008 are extremely limited. Because FDOE could not reserve funds under P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(a) for funding year 2007, FDOE will reserve the full 5 percent and allocate 95 percent of funds to LEAs under P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g). Funds will be allocated to LEAs based on greatest need and strongest commitment through a non-competitive Request for Application process.

All LEAs in the state have low achieving Title I schools, and 55 have schools planning for or implementing restructuring plans, for a total of 462 schools. In order to give priority to LEAs with the lowest achieving schools, and thus exhibiting the greatest need, FDOE will tier funding. Priority will be given to those LEAs that did not meet at least 25 percent of the AYP criteria. Within these LEAs, P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds will be allocated to schools based on greatest need, defined as SINI 4s and SINI 5s with the largest percentages of AYP criteria not attained and not currently receiving support under Assistance Plus.

Florida has chosen to define greatest need using the approach described above. The first tier identifies the lowest performing LEAs in the state, or those that met less than 75 percent of AYP criteria. The second tier identifies the lowest performing SINI 4s and 5s within those LEAs, classified as schools that met less than 85 percent of AYP criteria. These criteria allow Florida to fund 88 schools.

The identification of 88 schools to potentially receive P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds does not eliminate the needs of other schools identified for improvement. Therefore, FDOE has defined “strongest commitment” as those LEAs that are willing, in addition to supporting the targeted schools, to support a cohort of schools in need of improvement. The definition of the cohort will be defined by each eligible LEA. Such cohorts may include all SINI 4s and SINI 5s or all schools in improvement status. However, LEAs must use P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds to build their capacity to support schools in data analysis, curriculum alignment, and targeted interventions that address the needs of subgroups not making AYP.

Identification of 88 schools for these funds allows FDOE to subgrant \$61,856 per school. This amount exceeds the \$50,000 minimum allocation requirement, and FDOE believes this per school allocation will be sufficient to assist LEAs in building capacity to support data analysis, curriculum alignment, and specific, intensive interventions.



FDOE will issue a non-competitive Request for Application (RFA) to the 22 eligible LEAs. Within this application, LEAs will be required to identify strategies, and provide their rationale, from a menu of activities that, based on student achievement data, will increase the number and percentage of proficient students in those subgroups not making AYP. In addition, LEAs will be asked to describe how such decision(s) will ultimately assist them and the targeted school(s) exit improvement status. LEAs will be permitted to pool their funds or allocate funds to eligible schools for specific interventions.

In order to ensure that P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(g) funds are focused on creating systems of continuous feedback and improvement, LEAs will be required to employ their resources on a state defined set of activities. Allowable activities will be limited to: building the capacity of LEA level support teams to assist in data analysis and curriculum alignment; extending teacher contracts to allow ongoing data analysis and horizontal and vertical alignment; and/or focusing on one specific intensive intervention that has shown by research to be effective in addressing the needs of the subgroup(s) not making AYP.

In their applications, LEAs will be required to describe how their decision(s) were based on data and how implementation is expected to lead to the measurable outcomes listed in the United States Department of Education (USDE) call for proposals. If the LEA will be pooling funds to build the capacity of LEA level support teams, they will be required to identify the composition of those teams, the major activities the teams will conduct, and the frequency and duration of those activities.

LEAs that leverage funds to support a particular intervention must describe the scientific research base, how the intervention has been shown to increase performance of specific subgroups, and under what conditions the intervention will be implemented. Schools also will be required to submit plans that describe how these improvement strategies will be implemented.

In all cases, LEAs must describe how implementation will be monitored and assessed, including benchmarks for performance. In addition, LEAs will be required to submit mid-year and end of year reports that include formative and summative information from local assessments and staff surveys. These reports, along with the applications, will be available on the FDOE's website to allow access for all LEAs statewide.

FDOE requires an application process for any grant award and has refined its consolidated application process to ensure resource alignment. It is expected that LEAs will align resources from 2006-07 P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(a) funds, Title I, Part A, Title II, Parts A and D, and Title III funds. In keeping with the spirit and intent of Florida's 2008-2009 consolidated application, LEAs will be asked to identify other funding sources in their applications that will be used to augment the activities carried out under this award.

In addition, the application will require LEAs to describe how they will leverage these initial resources to provide support to the schools. If an LEA meets the benchmarks after

year one of the award, FDOE will consider it eligible for up to two additional one-year periods.

## **PART C – MONITORING**

As noted above, FDOE will require mid-year and end of year reports from participating schools and LEAs. In addition, FDOE will analyze state assessment data to measure the success of school improvement strategies. If FDOE determines, through such analysis, that the school improvement strategies supported with these funds are not contributing to increased student achievement, LEAs will be required to submit a written explanation. If it is determined that implementation issues exist, funds will be removed from the school or LEA and reallocated to other schools or LEAs. If it is determined that the critical success factors associated with the strategies are simply not realized due to state and LEA alignment, FDOE will consider amending this application to support implementation of strategies used in other states of similar demography that have been shown to be more effective.

Additionally, Florida has developed a comprehensive, risk based monitoring system that includes Title I, Title II, Title IV, Title V, and Title VI subgrants to LEAs. Beginning in 2008-2009, the School Improvement subgrants under P.L. 107-110, Section 1003(a) will be included in this system.

## **CONCLUSION**

Florida faces challenges in implementing a statewide system of support with the capacity to affect all schools in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Funds from this application will augment supports already in place at the FDOE to assist schools with the greatest needs and LEAs with the strongest commitment to helping all students achieve. LEAs will ensure that these funds are focused on creating systems of continuous feedback and improvement; they must employ their resources on a state defined set of activities that includes data analysis, curriculum and instruction alignment, and specific interventions that address the needs of subgroups not meeting the AYP criteria. A non-competitive Request for Application issued to 22 LEAs will allow distribution of resources that support meaningful initiatives designed to assist Florida's lowest performing schools and LEAs.